

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2513

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP

SUBJECT: GROMYKO VISIT TO PRAGUE

SUMMARY: SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO MADE A BRIEF BUT BUSY STOPOVER IN PRAGUE SEPT 27-28. HE RECEIVED AN HONORARY DOCTORATE FROM CHARLES UNIVERSITY AND THE ORDER OF THE WHITE LION, FIRST DEGREE, FROM PRESIDENT HUSAK, AND IN THE PROCESS DEMONSTRATED THE CLOSENESS OF THE SOVIET AND CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERSHIPS. WE ASSUME THAT HE ALSO BRIEFED THE LOCAL LEADERS ON CURRENT SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY. FOR WHATEVER REASONS, THE REGIME HERE DID THIS VISIT WITH CONSIDERABLE FLURISH. END SUMMARY. (WE ASSUME THE TEXTS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SPEECHES AND COMMUNIQUE ARE AVAILABLE TO

DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY MOSCOW.)

1. GROMYKO ARRIVED SATURDAY MORNING SEPT 27 AND WAS WELCOMED AT AIRPORT BY FORNMIN CHNOUPKE AND PRESIDUM MEMBERS BILAK, HULA, KAPEK AND KORCAK. (CHNOUPEK RETURNED FROM UNGA FOR GROMYKO'S VISIT AND RETURNS TO NY MONDAY SEPT 29. SOVIET AMB MATSKEVICH RETURNED FROM VACATION FOR THE VISIT.) GROMYKO WENT STRAIGHTWAY TO PRAGUE CASTLE FOR TALKS WITH HUSAK, THEN TO CHARLES UNIVERISITY FOR HONORARY DEGREE CEREMONY, AND ALSO FOUND TIME FOR TALKS AT FOREIGN MINISTRY WITH CHNOUPEK, BILAK AND FIRST DEPUTY FORNMIN KRAJCIR. GROMYKO DEPARTED FOR BERLIN SEPT 28, SEEN OFF BY SAME LINEUP WHO WELCOMED HIM.

2. GROMYKO'S VISIT GOT THE FULL-DRESS TREATMENT, WITH WELCOMING FLOWER GIRLS AND HEAVY PRESS AND TELEVISION COVERAGE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS WAS HIS FIRST VISIT TO PRAGUE IN SOME FIVE YEARS. IT IS ALSO FIRST HIGHLY-PLAYED-UP SOVIET VISIT SINCE BREZHNEV CANCELLED PLANS TO COME LAST MAY AND KIRILENKO CAME IN HIS STEAD.

3. ASKED PURPOSE OF VISIT, ZANOTVSKY (HEAD SIXTH DEPT MFA) SAID IT WAS TO ENABLE GROMYKO TO MEET WITH PARTY LEADERSHIP TO DISCUSS CURRENT FOREIGN POLICY DEVELOPMENTS. PRESS GAVE MOST ATTENTION TO DISCUSSION OF FOREIGN POLICY IN LIGHT OF HELSINKI FINAL ACT.

4. LEADERSHIP NOTES: EMPHASIS WAS PLACED ON FRIENDLY TALKS BETWEEN HUSAK AND GROMYKO: WE IMAGINE HUSAK WELCOMED CHANCE, AS ALWAYS, TO DEMONSTRATE SOVIET SUPPORT FOR HIMSELF PERSONALLY. AT AIRPORT AWAITING ARRIVAL, BILAK AND CHNOUPEK TALKED FOR A LONG TIME IN THE CORNER ANIMATEDLY AND APPARENTLY CORDIALLY, PRESUMABLY MAKING FINAL PLANS FOR THE VISIT. ONCE GROMYKO LANDED, HOWEVER, BILAK TOOK OVER AND SEEMED AT PAINS TO BE AT

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GROMYKO'S ELBOW THEREAFTER. HE MANAGED TO BE FRONT AND CENTER FOR PRESS AND TELEVISION COVERAGE AS WELL. (KAPEK ON OTHER HAND WAS RELATIVELY IN BACKGROUND.) SELECTION OF HULA, NEWEST FULL PRESIDUM MEMBER, AMONG GREETERS STRUCK US AS INTERESTING.

5. DIPLOMATIC CORPS TURNED OUT IN FULL FORCE EXCEPT

FOR ROMANIAN AMB HAS, THE DEAN, WHO WAS GENUINELY ILL, AND THE CHINESE AND ALBANIANS, WHO BOYCOTTED.

6. COMMENT. THE DEGREE CEREMONY AT CHARLES UNIVERSITY WAS IMPRESSIVE, WITH THE ANCIENT RITUAL, THE MAGNIFICENT FURS AND GOWNS OF THE FACULTY, THE BAROQUE MUSIC, AND THE LONG ADDRESS IN LATIN BY THE RECTOR. ONE REALIZED THE GULF BETWEEN PRAGUE AND MOSCOW, WATCHING THIS CEREMONY SO REMINISCENT OF PRAGUE'S STANDING AS FORMER CAPITAL OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE. THE CONTRAST BECAME STRONGER WHEN GROMYKO DELIVERED HIS RECEPTION SPEECH IN RUSSIAN, AND DID NOT DEEM NECESSARY TO HAVE IT TRANSLATED INTO LATIN OR CZECH. WHAT IS MORE, THE SPEECH WAS A GLORIFICATION OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY, AND IN PARTICULAR A DEFENSE OF THAT POLICY'S "HUMANITARIAN" TRADITION--A CLAIM WHICH HAD A STRANGE RING IN OCCUPIED CZECHOSLOVAKIA. PERHAPS THE GROMYKO VISIT WAS BEST SUMMED UP SO FAR AS LOCAL REACTION GOES BY AN OLD CZECH GENTLEMAN TO WHOM THE CHARGE READ THE HEADLINE FROM RUDE PRAVO SAYING "WE WELCOME COMRADE GROMYKO." THE OLD CZECH GENTLEMAN BURST INTO LAUGHTER AND SAID, "THEY (POINTING TOWARDS THE CASTLE) WELCOME HIM, BUT WE (POINTING TO HIMSELF) DON'T WELCOME HIM AT ALL."
PERRY

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